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ABSTRACT

This research study consisted of a three-tiered investigation, examining the roles of the local, state, and federal governments in bringing about the end of the dual system of education in South Carolina from 1964 to 1974. The study's purpose was twofold: (1) to detail the events leading up to and surrounding the desegregation of a county's school system in rural South Carolina; and (2) to compare the events in this county to the general pattern of events taking place in the state at the time to determine if this county was exceptional in its pattern of school unification. McCormick is a small rural school in western South Carolina with a black majority population. The area is dependent on service and agricultural jobs. The study entails the county's efforts to desegregate schools and the white reactions to those efforts. This study examines both archival and oral data sources. It is hoped this study will: (1) contribute to the archival history of South Carolina in this important era of state history; (2) add to the expansion of the present knowledge of educational history; and (3) address the needs of the school for a sense of identify from its own history. (EH)

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A Ten Year Social History

Of

School Desegregation

In

McCormick, South Carolina

By

Charles E Jenks

University of Georgia

Annual Meeting

Of

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Abstract:

A Ten Year Social History of School Desegregation in McCormick, South Carolina

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The purpose of my study was two-fold. First, I detailed the events leading up to and surrounding the desegregation of a county's school system in rural South Carolina. Second, I compared these events to the general pattern of events taking place in the state at the time. Since there were several approaches to the unification of the schools, I determined if this county was exceptional in the state.

The study consisted of a three tiered investigation, examining the roles of the local, state, and federal government in bringing about the end of the dual system of education that existed in South Carolina. I assessed the general political atmosphere at the various levels of government and how attitudes toward desegregation and the schools may have influenced the process of desegregation.

Through the analysis of the data, I recorded the events surrounding integration of a South Carolina school system. I hope the results will draw attention to the continued need for the study of and intervention in the area of race relations in our schools. In a small way, I hope to contribute to the archives of civil rights and educational

history, by pointing out to the reader what occurred from 1964 to 1974.

It is my hope that this effort will contribute to the history and practice of education. Historically, I feel the study will allow us to understand contemporary racial attitudes and history in better detail. From a social historian's point of view, this human struggle should not be forgotten. It will allow us to remember those individuals who experienced the radical change in schooling and the surrounding events.

The study can contribute to the practice of education in three ways. First, it expands our present knowledge of educational history. Second, it addresses the needs of this school for a sense of identity that a history can provide. It points out other needs such as professional development of the staff and community programs to develop better racial understanding. If this occurs, it will have a direct impact on future relations and the realization of our goals of equality and integration of society.

The third area of contribution is in the area of archival history. The study adds to the compiled history of South Carolina. There has been very little recorded about school desegregation during this period. As one historian told me, "Between the period of Reconstruction and the rise of the Republican 'Southern Strategy', South Carolina was looked upon as the backwater of civilization." Very little

historical investigation has focused on South Carolina, especially in the area of education.

I chose a rural school for several reasons. One was my familiarity with this school. Alan Peshkin (1977) pointed out another reason. "The study of rural schooling has been relatively neglected in recent decades; and yet, with the continued growth of urban society, small-town life has increasingly become an endangered species." His descriptions of Mansfield are very reminiscent of rural McCormick.

McCormick Today

McCormick is in western South Carolina and is far from average. It is within a traditional "Black Belt" and has a black majority population (87% of the approximately 7500 people). Within the county, there is the county seat and three small villages. Economically, the area is very dependent on service and agricultural jobs. There is a small manufacturing sector that concentrates on textiles. The school system integrated in 1970. There is an all white private academy that sprang up in reaction to that integration. Enrollment in the public schools is about 1200 and in the academy is about 75. Before 1964, there were no private schools in the area. Before the "early 1950's the county had in excess of 40 schools," most were one room schools provided for the black students. All schools have declined in attendance due to a general aging within the county's population. The surrounding counties have populations that are growing younger.

The reported unemployment rate is normally three times the state average and the number of people dependent upon transfer payments is also disproportionate. Many people depend on government sponsored housing (the county seat has three housing projects). Much of the rural housing is substandard. While infant mortality is high, McCormick is comparable to the surrounding counties. There are community health problems that tend to predominate in black communities (high blood pressure and heart problems).

Because McCormick has a population that is predominately black, it is a site of great interest. Because of the "equalization" movement in the early 1950's, the black schools consolidated into new facilities, which opened in 1954. The impact of this was investigated to see if it slowed the movement to unify the system. McCormick was one of the last two districts out of 108 in South Carolina to file a desegregation plan. This plan involved the unification of the schools in the county into one integrated system. This was only one of several plans attempted during this time.

To document the evolution and impact of the desegregation movement in the school system, I conducted a multifaceted investigation. In my case study, I examined both the archival and the oral sources of data for influences on the desegregation movement. There were forces working for and against the movement on three levels (the national, state and local). I created a historical picture

of the events took place during the court ordered desegregation of the schools.

To detail the past, I will first described the political climate in South Carolina during the 1960s and 1970s. Earl Black is an authority on the changing political climate in the state.(Terrill, 1993) His work, coupled with that of Jack Bass, provided a reliable picture of this moderating political environment. I researched local voting patterns to see if the local environment was comparable to that of the state.

I interviewed several educators. Some of these teachers experienced the event as students or as classroom teachers. I conducted a pilot study that involved interviewing white teachers that experienced the desegregation of the system as students, in which they became a minority. The pilot study proved to be fruitful in exploring the events surrounding the desegregation of the local education system.

Introduction

Critical of the traditional historical examination of the past, Herbert Guttman set forth the need to study the individual and their choices. He suggests placing emphasis on people's actions rather than their passive reactions. Historians can examine events as eruptions from below and attempted control from above, rather than the more traditional view of the powerful leading and the submissive following (Golan, 1990). While this approach is more predominant in labor history, there exists a strong parallel in educational history.

The Actions of Federal and State Government

In 1954, The Supreme Court concluded that "in the field of public.education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483, 1954; hereafter cited as Brown I). The following year the Court decreed that the defendants in the cases make a prompt start toward compliance of its earlier ruling. It went on to order that desegregation should take place and remand the cases to the federal district courts "to take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees consistent with this opinion as are necessary and proper to admit to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis, with all deliberate speed . . . "(Brown II). This marked the beginning of debate over the Brown decision and

what it would mean for public education. The debate allowed those opposing integration the opportunity to avoid any implementation at all.

By "the end of 1965, well under one per cent of the Negro children in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana attended school with whites. Faculty desegregation had not begun in those states or others. Segregated public education remained the real problem" (Bass, 1981, p. 117). Other than a few cases, many states had completely avoided the implementation of the Brown case. The Fourth Circuit's Chief Judge John Parker encouraged delay of Brown v. The Board by his findings. His definition of the Briggs v. Elliot decision was that the Constitution "does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination." Briggs originated in Clarendon County, South Carolina and would be one of the cases making up Brown v. The Board. Ten years after "Parker's famous dictum, the Clarendon school district remained totally segregated" (Bass, p. 204).

It would be the catch all phrase "with all deliberate speed" that would assure the citizens of South Carolina that change would not come quickly. An editorial that appeared in The State exemplified their attitude following the Supreme Court decision. It said, "So while the day of reckoning may have been postponed, the question involved still must be faced ultimately . . . We anticipate no early attempts at forced integration in this state" (June 2,1955, p. 4A). This

signaled the beginning of resistance to desegregated public schools in South Carolina.

The resistance to integration would take many forms. In 1955, "the compulsory school attendance law was repealed on the recommendation of a committee established to develop strategies for dealing with school desegregation issues" (The State, June 1,1955). The following month, a three judge federal panel ordered Clarendon District One not to refuse admission of pupils to any school based on race. The decree voided the state law requiring segregation, but failed to set a deadline for compliance. They stated, "The Constitution . . . does not require integration. It merely forbids discrimination" (The News and Courier, July 16, 1955, p 1A).

The establishment of resistance paralleled an even more important problem. The Court defined the need to desegregate the schools but failed in the establishment of guidelines. This created a problem that local communities had to face. The Court ordered local communities to eliminate separate but equal schools. Yet, even if there was no resistance, the authorities failed to instruct the local communities how best to achieve that mandate.

South Carolina watched reports of outbursts of violence in Little Rock, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, and Oxford. It became a concern of officials that there should not be such violence in South Carolina. In one of his last speeches, before the legislature, Governor Ernest Hollings warned that

"South Carolina was running out of courts and that when legal remedies had been exhausted, the state needed to make a clear choice for government by law rather than government by men . . . Hollings emphasized the people should act with dignity and maintain law and order" (Wall Street Journal, January 28, 1963). Clemson College and the University of South Carolina, under court order, desegregated without incident in that year.

The year 1963 would prove to be pivotal for public schooling in South Carolina. Not only had the two major colleges moved forward, admitting Black students, but so had public schools. Based on litigation, Charleston public schools admitted its first black students. This period marked the beginning of litigation in Greenville and Sumter counties as well. By 1964, five of the state's 46 counties had become involved in court actions. The resulting rulings were all the same; they ordered each to admit the complainants and fully desegregate by the 1965 -1966 school year (Southern School News, September, 1964). This resulted in the token desegregation of 16 of the state's 108 public school districts.

As important as the Court activities were, it was the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that further influenced the movement toward integration of South Carolina's public schools. Title VI, of the Civil Rights Act, provided that "no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from

participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (U.S. Commission On Civil Rights Clearinghouse Publication No. 72, 1970, p.1).

The Office for Civil Rights consolidated under the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1967 and received all the responsibility for enforcement of Title VI. Under guidelines issued, HEW gave school districts some options for complying with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. One option was the submission of a form assuring OCR that they were operating on a non-discriminatory basis. Another option was to submit a form stating they were operating under a Court ordered desegregation plan. The final option was to submit a plan for school desegregation to be approved by HEW officials (Federal Register, December 4, 1964).

By the spring of 1965, more than 90 of South Carolina's 108 districts had submitted desegregation plans to HEW. By that summer only 2 had received letters approving their plans (Southern School News, June, 1965). HEW's approval of plans was based on the district providing a start toward desegregation in 1965 and total desegregation by 1967. This time table received an additional impetus from the Congress, when they passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Voting Rights Act, both in 1965.

While the impact of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 cannot be diminished, the impact of the Elementary and Secondary School Act was greater because of the substantial

funding it provided to public schools. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act gave the Office for Civil Rights the power to withhold these funds. This had considerable impact on local and state efforts to desegregate the public schools. Many school districts had become dependent upon these funds for the operation of their schools.

"Freedom-of-Choice" plans became a common response to the Federal Government's pressure to desegregate. After 1966, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals attempted to clarify the definition of freedom of choice. "Freedom of Choice means the maximum amount of freedom and clearly understood choice in a bona fide unitary system where schools are not white schools or Negro schools -- just schools"(United States v. Jefferson County Board of Education, 372 F. 2d 1040, 5th Circuit, 1966). This order was upheld by the Supreme Court the following year. A NAACP spokesperson declared this ruling was the "most influential school desegregation opinion since Brown I." It sanctioned HEW guidelines and subjected all freedom-of-choice plans to close scrutiny by the courts (Southern Regional Council, 1968).

The most definitive move toward school desegregation came in May 1968. The United States Supreme Court decided, in the United States v. County School Board of New Kent County, that freedom-of-choice was only a means to an end.

> In desegregating a dual system of education, a plan utilizing student 'freedom-of-choice' is not an end in itself but only a means to the constitutionally

> required end, the abolition of the system of segregation and its effects, and if it fails to undo segregation, other means must be used to achieve that end. . . . The transition to a unitary, non-racial system of public education was and is the ultimate end to be brought about (Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, 391 U.S. 430, 1968).

In 1970, The Justice Department filed suit against the schools lacking HEW approved desegregation plans. In the United States v. Barnwell, the Fourth District Court ordered the remaining ten school districts in South Carolina to comply with desegregation guidelines. The Court instructed the involved parties to

> attempt to reach agreement as to such plans and shall report to this Court on or before July 27, 1970 as to the results of such attempts. Where there is no agreement the parties may file with this Court on or before August 5, 1970 suggested plans for operating a unitary, non-discriminatory system. If no plan is agreed upon, the Office of Education is requested to submit its recommendation for acceptable plans in each district on or before August 5, 1970"(United States v. Barnwell County School District No. 19, C.A. No. 70-599, 1970).

The public schools of South Carolina opened their doors that fall with all systems operating unitary schools.

School district officials in McCormick, South Carolina were very concerned. By 1965, they began to realize that the elimination of their dual school system was possible, if not inevitable. Based on HEW's ability to withhold funds, the county's officials realized they faced the loss of $196,532.00, which represented the federal contribution to their budget (The 1966 Annual Report of the State Superintendent Education, p.143). This represented 24.6% of their budget that year. The county was not only the smallest

in the state but also among the poorest. A loss of federal funds would represent a tax increase that most county residents would be unwilling to support (John McCrackin, 1993).

The McCormick County Schools

McCormick County schools evolved from a network of 25 school districts in 1945. John McCrackin, former Superintendent of Schools, said,

> There were school buildings all over this county at one time. The main reason was transportation. At one time I had a list that Ms. Kate Brown, who was the attendance supervisor until she retired in the early 1970's. I believe she gave me a list with at least twenty four or something like that. See now they were consolidated in the 1950's when they began to build these buildings when James Byrnes passed the sale tax. And then they began to put on the school buses to carry the students (McCrackin, 1993).

Ms. Mamie Banks could clearly remember the evolution of the schools for blacks in the northern end of the county. She remembered:

> "I went to Willington school in the 7th grade, one year. The first year school was built. Must have been in 1954. That was called Mims #3. I only went there one year because that was the highest grade they taught at that time. After going through Mims #3 for one year, all students in that area went to the School in McCormick in 8th grade. We stayed over there across the bridge for one year, then moved to high school for grades 9-12"(Banks, 1993).

She recalled that her elementary school was

> Gracie Reynolds School, Gracie Reynolds was my teacher. She taught everybody in that area. I was very young in that one room and but then older people were in room also. She taught all day. A lot of us had the same things(subjects); the students who were smarter helped those that were not so bright. That's how we worked it. That school was above Mount Carmel; between Mt. Carmel and Calhoun Falls; it is really about half way between, near a place called the overhead bridge, just

about to the Abbeville County line on South Carolina highway 81. We walked to that school probably about four miles everyday.
After leaving that one-room school, I went to a three-room school, which was right at my church. It was just a building with three rooms; one room, one room, one room(indicating a three story building). Mr. Carnel Reynolds was my teacher there. I left the one-room school in the 6th grade. I only went to Rockford one year. Because I lived at the very northern part of McCormick County; very northern. So we had schools in Mt. Carmel, one-room schools. I think the name of it may be Mt. Pleasant, because they named the schools after the churches. There might have been one next to St. Mary; every church had a school near it. Then they had a Mulberry School. All these are Black churches. Then I went to Rockford; we had three rooms. Therefore we had three teachers, Mr. J.C. Threatt, he was the principal at that school. He had three teachers. So, Mr. Threet, I believe was our principal. Ms. Frasier, was a teacher like 1st - 3rd grade. Then we had somebody that was 4th grade .... you know like I can't remember exactly. She was the teacher, Ms. Frasier. I can't remember the other one. I don't know really whether Mr. Threet was there; Mr. Reynolds might have been the head teacher; but when we got to Willington, that's when Mr. John Curtis Threatt was our principal(Banks, 1993).

When asked about the financial support for the black schools, Ms. Banks replied, " By the Board of Education, because I remember,

> even in the one-room school, we would have a nurse to come out and give us the shots. We knew that the superintendent might come once a year or something; to see us. We had to do good for the superintendent. I remember that. So it had to be state supported" (Banks, 1993)

Her experiences focused on the experience of attending black schools, segregated and poor. She still recalls that whites also attended small schools as well, just separate and financially sound. She recalls a school in the same part of the county. There was:

> a school for White people. We have one in Mt. Carmel (now) called the community center, community house, that was for White people. It is just below Rockford Church; my church, . . . and right across from that is

> the White people's community center.That was a school because I have been there when I worked at the polls and that is where we had the voting. And they have names there of people who went to that school (Banks, 1993).

1954 changed the schools of McCormick County. Governor James Byrnes and the South Carolina Legislature passed a three cent sales tax. The program provided "the most ambitious school program in South Carolina's history. It provided for school-building under the bond program, state operation of school transportation, and higher teacher's salaries paid on an equal basis to both races" (Kluger, Simple Justice, p.334, 1977). This meant new schools for McCormick.

In 1945, there were 37 schools for black students and 7 schools for white students (McCormick County Schools Attendance Officer,1945). There were many schools closed and others consolidated into new buildings. Mims High School, Mims Elementary School #1(in McCormick), and Mims Elementary School #3(in Willington) opened for black students in 1954. McCormick High School and Plum Branch Elementary opened in the same year for white students. The former McCormick School was enlarged and converted to McCormick Elementary School. With the opening of Plum Branch School, Washington School was converted to Mims Elementary #2 (in Parksville). By the end of 1954, the county would have 5 schools for black students and 3 schools for whites.

Ms. Sandy DeColaines recalled that classes at McCormick High School (all white) tended to be "small; 18 maybe; 20 at

the most. Now I thought that was big because at Plum Branch I had 8-10 (students) in a class, so this was big to me!"

She recalled her teachers:

> I always thought they were good teachers. I do remember having several, as I look back, they were not competent teachers. For the most part, they were very traditional teachers. I remember I had lots of homework to do. (They had) high, high expectations of us. This was my public education which got me successfully through graduate school. They were strict; I remember strict teachers, and there was very little disruption in class, and if there was disruption it was immediately handled.

Sandy points out that most of the students expected to go on to college. She remembered that most of the students were in:

> College Prep classes. And it was this division; it was like the kids that were in that and they would take the literature, the algebra, and the science courses. Then the other students who were in the vocational courses, that is what they were called. I can't even remember those students; I don't remember their names really. I remember faces; but it was like a complete division after that started in 9th grade. . . . people would come up to me and they'll say "I was in school with you." I don't even know them; they're like complete strangers to me.

The segregation within white society appeared to be based on socio-economic status. The determination of a student's tracking within the school seemed to be determined by the parent's ability to pay for college. When Ms. DeColaines considered the dominating criteria that influenced white students to enroll in vocational classes, she admitted that they were the poor students who probably couldn't afford to go onto college. If you were poor, you needed to learn how to make a living,

> A vocation. Right. It was actually in a different area of the school too. It was down in the area that is the

> lunchroom now. And I remember you had to go through this outer door; you had to go outside to get to that part of the building; so it was really isolated. And I can remember; I can remember looking through the window, maybe, but I don't think I physically ever went there. I imagine that particular element would have fed right into the ranks of the (textile) mill or the pulp wood industry (DeColaines, 1993).

George Edwards began teaching at Mims High School in September of 1954. He had recently graduated from South Carolina State College. He recalled the separation that existed between the two high schools during that period.

> I didn't know any of those teachers(at McCormick High), just that they had a good athletic program there. I was coach up here when we started the football team. I remember trying to get some equipment when we started a football team the first year I worked here. We needed equipment and stuff, so we only had a limited number. We had something like twelve complete uniforms and we had a large number of guys come out because it was the first year we had a football team; and we tried to get some stuff from the White high school and they said they didn't have any they could spare for us. But a couple years later when we got another football coach, I think he went over and they sort of gave us their old stuff. That first year we played must have been 15 uniforms; we had to switch the stuff around everyday because we had so many come to practice. After that guys didn't have equipment and stuff so they quit participating. That was one of the problems. The White high school had everything you could imagine as far as equipment and we had none (Edwards, 1993).

While the state required all teachers to be paid equally by the school district, they did not treat all teachers equally. The Selective Service Act allowed teachers to be deferred from military service. The school authorities simply had to verify a teacher's employment. George Edwards had taught at Mims High School for two years, when the Selective Service informed him to report for duty. He recalls:

> When I got drafted, I was from Greenville and they needed a quota from that area, I thought that I could get away by being a public school teacher and the Superintendent didn't think it was necessary for me to get a waiver and he refused to send a letter to the draft board in Greenville verifying my employment as a teacher. I'm sure he could have gotten me a waiver if he wanted to. He just said that he thought that if they needed a certain number of draftees, than they should get that number of people(Edwards, 1993).

Former School Superintendent, John McCrackin summed up the community's position toward financially supporting the Black schools:

> Now Ms. Harris let Dr. Mims, that is Dr. W. S. Mims, as long as he was living and was operating the school system, he did mostly what he wanted to do and he would come down and tell her, Ms. Harris, I have a teacher who is leaving on maternity leave and I need another teacher, and she said, do you have someone in mind, and he said yes, so and so, doesn't have but two years of College or one year or whatever. And she said, well, will that suit you?, I want to get her, he more or less ran his school. In those days, the White people didn't care what the Blacks did as long as it didn't bother them. That's just the thinking of the time. That is just for the thinking. And also, Dr. Mims, raised money to buy school supplies; a lot of it; the paper and things. He didn't bother the county about that. They'd just put on a little program and have a big time (McCrackin, 1993).

The 1967 Mims High School yearbook listed Mr. Fletcher Pierce as the Solicitor. He explained this position as, "In that particular yearbook, I believe it was just a listing for (selling) advertisement in the book, it had nothing to do with instruction. It had to do with my going out in the community and soliciting funds to publish the book" (Pierce, 1993). It seemed common for the black schools to raise funds however possible. Ironically, this seemed to gain Dr. Mims a great deal of independence from the white administrators and

a great deal of respect from the black community for his accomplishments.

Dr. Mims maintained a curriculum his high school that was the same as offered at the white school. "We just didn't have the same equipment like in lab, chemistry lab, we talk about how to do it, where they (white school) could carry out a lot of experiments, where over here we had a lab but no equipment to do very much with" (Edwards, 1993).

When asked to compare the differences in curriculum offered between the two schools, Dr. Susan Bussell said there was very little difference. " I've looked at those records. Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Biology I and Chemistry. They did not have Physics; I don't recall seeing Physics on anybody's transcripts before the schools were integrated. But I think they had Chemistry II; which we don't have now, so. It is interesting - they even put the names of the textbooks that they used on the records" (Bussell, 1993).

Dr. Bussell went on to characterize the faculty of Mims High School as all being college educated. She added:

> I've been told that all of them didn't have certificates period. But they were College educated. And I understand they did a lot of, there was a lot of crossing over from subject to subject. Mr. Mims, who was the son of the founder of Black education in this area and was the principal when I came here, taught Algebra. I can remember him telling me that was his least favorite thing to do. But you taught what you were told to teach, and you went home, brushed up on it, and you learned it well enough to teach it. I think there was a good deal of people teaching out of field (Bussell, 1993).

Local Reaction to National Events

Even isolated McCormick County, could not escape the change that time would bring. To secure federal funding, the school officials had to follow HEW guidelines established in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. A loss of federal funds would represent a tax increase that most county residents would be unwilling to support (McCrackin,1994). Forty per cent of the land in the county was National Forest, for which the school received revenue for the loss of tax base. The funds could be endangered also by a failure to comply with HEW guidelines. Local school officials developed a "Freedom-of-Choice" plan in order to gain compliance.

Beginning in 1965, the local school authorities instituted the beginnings of school desegregation. Each spring, they published, in the McCormick Messenger, a "Notice of School Desegregation Plan Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964." "The purpose of the plan is to eliminate from the school system the racial segregation of students and all other forms of discrimination based on race, color or national origin" (The Messenger, March 31, 1966). The plan had seventeen sections spanning from the purpose to how to report violations. The basic process required a student or his or her parent filling out a "school choice form" during the thirty day spring choice period. They provided detailed instructions on how to fill out the forms. Students were free to attend any school they

and their parents chose. "No choice will be denied for any reason other than overcrowding. In cases where granting all choices for any school would cause overcrowding, the students choosing the school who live closest to it will be assigned to that school. Whenever a choice is to be denied, overcrowding will be determined by a standard applicable to all schools" (The Messenger, March 31, 1966).

The Freedom-of-Choice plan included desegregation of the school transportation and faculties. "Faculties will be desegregated and no staff member will lose his position because of race, color, or national origin. This includes any case where less staff is needed because schools are closed or enrollment is reduced" (The Messenger, March 31,1966). It was 1969 before the faculties desegregated.

The Office for Civil Rights School System Summary Report (1969) documents the token desegregation of teachers in McCormick County during the period ending the Freedom-of Choice era. That report shows Mims High School (19 teachers) and Mims Elementary School #2 (15 teachers) had all black faculties. McCormick High had 18 teachers, 2 of which were black (11%). McCormick Elementary had 17 faculty members, one that was black (5.8%). Plum Branch Elementary had 5 teachers, all were white. Mims Elementary School #3 had 17 teacher, 2 of which were white (12%). Mims Elementary School #1 had 29 teachers, 2 of which were white (7%). The McCormick Area Vocational School had 1 black and 2 white teachers.

Former school superintendent, John McCrackin recalled that:

> one of the best things we ever had here was the "Freedom of Choice." They volunteered and said if you want to come to McCormick High School, fine, you want to go to Mims High School, fine. You do what you want to do. We had Blacks that came on over to McCormick High School, and they were accepted and people were nice to them.

The first black students to attend previously all white McCormick High School enrolled in the 1966 - 1967 school year (Sellers, Decolaines, Elam, Edwards 1993). There were a total of 5 students that left Mims High School and set the example for others to follow. Lynda Brown, Helen Lomax, and Larry McCombs were freshmen. Julia Elam and Shirley Banks were seniors. Most people characterized the shift during this period as two waves. The first group enrolled in 1966 and then a much larger group two years later.

By 1969, enrollment figures showed that McCormick High School had a total of 32 black students and 277 whites students (11.5% minority students). Mims High School had an enrollment of 388 black students and no white students. McCormick Elementary School had a total enrollment of 354 students, 18 of whom were black (5%). Plum Branch Elementary School had a total enrollment of 89 students, 6 of whom were black (6.7%). Mims Elementary School #3 had a total enrollment of 298, all were black. Mims Elementary School #1 had a total enrollment 728, all were black. Mims Elementary School #2 had a total enrollment of 345 students, all were

black. There were no white students that chose to attend any school other than the predominately white schools (Office for Civil Rights, School System Summary Report, 1969).

Billy Sellers recalled Freedom-of-Choice from a white student's perspective. He said:

> I can remember there was one student and I believe his name was Malo Cade. He didn't seem to get a long well at all. I don't know whether it was his part on the part of the other students. I can remember talk of verbal shouting matches between he and some other students after school; what have you; nothing in school, to my knowledge. Other than him, and I believe he was in that first year. Everyone else seemed to get along fine. He was the only student I really recall having any real problems (Sellers, 1993).

Nancy Elam presents a very different perspective. Her older sister had been the first black student to transfer to McCormick High School. Nancy chose to follow her sister's example. She recalled:

> I went to school at McCormick High School. That was in, I would say in 1969. During that time it was frightening because you didn't know who to communicate with. The teachers were very nice, but now the students weren't nice to you. They would throw paper at you, there were too many to fight. If I were in the classroom sometime and, like the PE class if the girls picked at you, sometimes I'd take them up on it and ask them what they said, because they were a bunch of girls, because I figured I could handle them.

Nancy said she felt that even the black community looked at her differently,"because they thought 'Well, she thinks she's special; she's going to the White school.' After awhile they adjusted, after the first year" (Elam, November 1993). This problem was a common perception among other members of the black community (Banks, Edwards, Elam 1993).

Even isolated McCormick County, did not escape the change that time would bring. To secure federal funding, the school officials had to follow HEW guidelines established in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. A loss of federal funds would represent a tax increase that most county residents would be unwilling to support (McCrackin, 1994). The Federal Courts had moved to abolish Freedom-of-Choice. As was true in McCormick, the plan failed to integrate the schools elsewhere. State Superintendent of Education Cyril Busbee called a meeting in Columbia for school officials. Judge Julius Baggett, then the attorney for the school district, recalled:

> I remember distinctly they had a large meeting of school officials and attorneys in Columbia. We meet in the township auditorium. We were addressed by some people from the Washington offices of the Civil Rights Division. I recall they were extremely rude, intolerant, and arbitrary (Baggett, February, 1994).

The McCormick County Superintendent of Education, John McCrackin was also present at the meeting. He explained the events as follows:

> As well as I remember, if I am on the right track we went to Columbia on Monday. Dr. Busbee had contacted Mr. Cely, saying he wanted us over there with a good representation from your school district. We have some very important information coming out about the school system of South Carolina. So we met and chose a group to go. Dr. Brown then told me to get Harvey Lee Murray and Dr. Mims to go. We were the group there with an integregated team. Everyone there was white except us. I think HEW noticed that, cause we were not . . It was Dr. Brown's idea was if we are to integrate the schools how can we do it without the help of the black people. Which was true and Dr. Busbee got up there and said it is all over. There is no reason to try to go on. The

> order has come down that all of the schools are to be integregated this fall. And the next day, Tuesday, a man held up a sheet of paper that was an order signed by Richard M Nixon, President of the United States. I remember George Dorn, who was president of the board, said, "Buddy that's it. It is all over. There is no reason to argue. That's the President of the United States and that's it!
> So we accepted that thing as fact. It was incumbent upon us to try to work out as reasonable a plan as we could to keep down any trouble. I don't want you to get the impression that the board just voluntarily jumped into the thing. We don't want to give you that impression. That would not be honest to say the board jumped in and did all these wonderful things. What we did was jump in and work to keep down any trouble (McCrackin, January, 1994).

During this period, everyone appeared concerned about the possibility of violence breaking out. The impact of violence was great. Governor Robert McNair spoke of the violent episodes in Lamar and Orangeburg. He recalled details from the South Carolina State College incident to the point of remembering that one black student killed was in high school. This violence sprang from student attempts to desegregate a bowling alley. "From that point forward, the state would no longer accept any violence" (McNair, January, 1994).

The fear of violence dictated the methods the local officials used to develop a plan that HEW would accept. Many local educators knew nothing of the behind the scenes work that took place. McCrackin explained, "That was part of our intention. If we had put that in the newspaper, some of the stuff we did, things could have exploded." He went on to say:

> We quietly worked. We conducted little things and I got called all kinds of names by some of my good white friends. I just has to take it. They went ahead and

> organized the private schools. At first, we were worried about it. Jack Gantt stepped in, he said 'it was the best thing they had ever done'. I said, 'What in the world are you talking about?They're going to take 150-200 white students and we don't have them to spare'. He said it was an escape valve. He said, the ones that are going over there the children are going to give you any trouble, the parents are the ones who will give you the trouble; and actually that is true.

Governor Robert McNair observed that:

> He expected the most resistance from the more rural areas, "especially the black majority areas because of the creation of black majority schools and the resistance of whites to them. Pressure from the state, HEW, and the Courts allowed locals to save face and place the blame for integration on the shoulders of someone outside of their own communities. This made the transition a little smoother." (McNair, 1994)

Due to the fact the local school officials feared trouble breaking out they worked in executive sessions. The result was no public record of their work. John McCrackin and Julius Baggett were present at these meetings. McCrackin remembered:

> They kept telling us, after we got in there, at the time I got in there, that was what 1969, that was all you heard everywhere. They were telling us come up with a plan. Well, Edgefield County, the different counties around here were trying to come up with, put 25% Blacks in this one, and 75% White, and 33% Blacks and 65% White. The trouble is, in this County, you got about, in the school district right now I think is about 90% Black, there is no way you can put 25% Black. There are some classes there is nothing but Black. There is no way. There is just not enough White people around. Anyway, that was, in 1969. One week we spent, we have five meetings one week, Monday night, Tuesday night - several of us. Tom McComb was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and he said he believed his wife was going to kill him. We'd stay until 1:00 or 2:00 at night. One time I know it was 2:00 before we left. We had to go over all these things, they kept saying, send in a plan. We'd send in a plan, they'd say we don't want that. HEW had some creative folks over there. We had one little rascal who came down here from Washington, D.C. and rented a car, charged the car to

the School District, and didn't tell us about it. Came up here 2-3 days on that rental car, after he left they sent us a bill for rental service. He was sorry, but he got away with it.
Anyway, the plan that I remember that really counted was the one that Jack Gantt had got up a plan, he had, Jack, he spent hours. Now he was a White principal. Jack Gantt had gotten up the seating capacity in gymnasium and everything at the middle school and the high school, and the Plum Branch School, and everything, he put it all together. He came down and said the only way to make this thing operate is take your White High School and move it over to the Mims School, and make a middle school over here, and he began to formulate that thing.Several of the others kept up with the idea of having 25% Blacks and 75% White; they stayed in that for a long time.
I remember one of the last meetings we had, and in fact it probably was the last meeting after we got the order to integrate, by September, the Board had instructed me to give them that first, give them that alternate, we had two plans. One was a percentage plan and we gave it to the HEW people, and I think there was two of them there and they looked at it and said, this is not going to fly, it doesn't meet so and so and so. The way I remember, Dr. Brown was down on the end of the table and he said," All right, Johnny give them the real plan, let's get through with it."
Before that plan we had this drawn, and was total integration, except for the fact that we wanted Willington and Washington to have free access into town because we had been busing White people and we had some Blacks down there who wanted to come in here and play basketball.

Judge Julius Baggett added:

I was fortunate to be in on these discussions and was advising the school board on the legality of the situation. As a matter of fact, a plan was developed which was ultimately approved by the federal district court.
There is another discouraging thing that I care to report. The school district was sued by the federal government when it was totally unnecessary, due to the fact the desegregation plan had been worked out on an amicable basis. I remember going to Spartanburg to have a hearing before the Honorable Donald Russell, who at that time was a district court judge. He later became a judge on the Fourth District Court of Appeals. We represented to the judge at that time, there was no way we could do anything further then what had been planned. It was proposed that we bus white students from McCormick up to Willington, some twenty miles

> away. And we simply told him that there was already a flight of white students from the school system and if this were required there would be probably no white students left to be bussed to the Willington area. (Baggett, 1994)

Judge Donald Russell approved the final desegregation plan in October 1970. School had opened that year at the normal time in late August. Everyone was anxious about what would happen as McCormick County Schools began the year as a unified school system. Because so much of the planning had taken place behind closed doors, the public had a right to wonder what had taken place. Teachers had left the previous year knowing only that they had a contract, without knowing even where they would be assigned to teach. Students left the previous year not knowing what schools they would attend the next year.

Gaye McKee recalled," I don't remember any kind of preparation for the change. I remember some of my 8th grade teachers talking to us; encouraging us not to go to private school. But as far as the administration or the Board members or anything, doing anything for the transition; there was nothing"(Gaye McKee, October 1993). Her response was very typical of students going through the experience. Among their greatest concerns was whether they or their friends would continue in public school or attend the private academy, which opened in reaction to integration. As time went by some fears were allayed and new concerns arose.

> Sandra DeColaines remembered:
> the first day at school when we all met at the elementary school auditorium; I can't remember how we got there. I don't know. I remember being at the

> elementary school and sitting. I remember I sat beside a Black girl and I can remember thinking;just looking at her skin; looking at her clothes; and thinking this is going to be strange. I don't remember who talked to us - I suppose it was the principals. I wasn't listening obviously; I don't remember what they said to us or anything. But I do remember some kind of meeting where we seniors were together, both races were together. (DeColaines, 1993)

Teachers had to begin to deal with the change as well. Martha Patterson began teaching in McCormick in 1935 and admitting that this was the greatest change she had seen in the schools. She said:

> Yes, it was different that way. I felt personally that I had to, in preparing lessons and all, I could not maybe say things that I had said previously in class, because I had that mixed class there. I would have to present things in terms that would not offend anyone. There was some incident, forgot what it was. Mr. Gantt, a former army officer a forceful personality, I guess. They had meetings in the gym over there, about an hour and a half. We were discussing things. I remember one boy from Clark's Hill; they were just talking about the change; you couldn't say "boy" because that was insulting to use that term. I remember discussing discrimination and he asked me, "Just be honest with me Ms. Patterson, do you think there has never been any discrimination?" I told him, "There has been discrimination ever since time began." If you read the Bible, you can see how people were discriminated against; I guess we'll always have it. The Blacks are not the only groups that have been discriminated against; there were others that have been discriminated against. I tried to talk to him like that. I tried to be honest with him about it. This was a government class, we were talking about organizations that they formed - the NAACP - they'd say, "What's that?"and his mother was one of the main leaders here in town. I think they were just trying me to see what I would say! (Martha Patterson, January 1994)

The perspective of black teachers was different than Ms. Patterson. They all agreed that there was a new challenge, a new pressure. George Edwards summed it up:

> You had most of the Black teachers trying to prove they were good teachers. For some reason, they got this phobia that Black high schools did not produce a quality student. I think our students were prepared when they went off to school even before integration. We had a high percentage graduating and going on to college. That is what they were trying to do, to prove that they were good teachers. They were going all out and trying to give that extra. Then the White teachers who assumed they were good teachers they didn't have to do that extra, they did not have anything to prove. They found out when they had the student body pick who were the best teachers, the Black teachers always won and they thought that they won there were more Black students than White. That wasn't the case because the student government voted on it and they were half and half. Most of the time it wouldn't be a real close vote; a large majority of them voting for the black teachers. (Edwards, 1993)

Much to everyone's surprise there was no racial violence. There were new rules that seemed to go out of the way to guarantee fair treatment. All aspects of school were set up to be bi-racial. Students voted on a school name, mascot, and school colors to signal a new start.

Judge Julius Baggett summed the transition up well when he said, "I think that the preparation of the school buildings and the acceptance of the little token things such as the mascot and names to accommodate everyone who was attending school had a lot to do with it. Here again, I believe that the good cooperation of the teachers and faculty, both black and white; and again the effect of Dr. Mims and his son (who was then in the school system) no doubt had a lot to do with the harmony that prevailed" (Baggett, 1994).

Summary:

While the nation moved forward with desegregating its schools, even the most remote areas could not escape the change. The white minority in McCormick, South Carolina clearly controlled the local government and its schools. Even though this control was complete, they could not hold out any longer. Most people living there feel that the desegregation of the schools marked the turning point in local race relations and civil rights.

When the children of McCormick were forced together in its schools, the adults were forced to look at other institutions in the community as well. No longer were there restaurants with back door service for black citizens. It was now less complicated to take part in the political process. Recent times have seen black majority school boards and black representation in all other elected offices. While there is still room for improvement, most tend to agree that the movement within the schools has directly effected and improved the surrounding community.

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